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### (As told to her by Ola Maupin, Lillie Westmoreland, Maud Vincent and verified by Jack Maupin)

Weakley County, Tennessee's Austin Springs was a bustling little community in the early 1900s. Fount Gibson and C.C. McClain owned one of the two general mercantile stores. The brothers Chap and Clyde Johnson owned the other. Austin Springs also had a blacksmith shop, a gristmill and a sawmill that employed many of the residents of the community.

Austin Springs also had a three-story hotel that hosted guests from Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati and people from as far away as Philadelphia who came to take advantage of the mineral baths and drink the sparkling water promoted by the hotel. Miss Lottie Summers was the first switchboard operator at the hotel to take reservations over new long distance lines connecting the health resort to Kentucky's main switching system. Wes Maupin and Leslie Westmoreland often hitched the hotel's team and drove a surrey into Fulton to pick up guests from the Illinois Central Railroad depot.

Miss Hattie, Fount's Gibson's wife, made several trips to St. Louis during the year to purchase dress materials and millinery for the ladies of the community. Miss Hattie would often ask the ladies whether there was any particular item they desired from St. Louis. Sometimes she would take with her a sketch of a hat or a pattern for a dress one of the women would ask her to look for. Often the McClain girls would ask for a certain piece of dress material or a sophisticated hat their mother could bring back from her buying trip. They were never disappointed in her selections.

Gibson and McClain or the Johnsons sold almost everything that any farmer or his family would need all year. A big pot-bellied stove sat in the middle of the store to warm the customers while they waited to have their shipping lists filled.

But I have not named all of the businesses in and around the little community of Austin Springs.

Many evenings, just at dusk, little streams of smoke could be seen filtering through sycamore and cypress treetops. It was smoke from the one cash crop those who made it called "white lightnin'." These "corn-squeezin's" sold by the keg or the Mason jar. Most area grocers knew who operated stills by the volume of sugar the bootlegger bought. Home-brew could hardly be distilled without the sugar it took to ferment the corn. To rid themselves of incriminating residues, moonshiners fed hogs the leftover mash. After indulging themselves, the hogs would squeal and carry on and sidle back to the trough for seconds and thirds.

Bootleg whiskey-making wasn't a profession talked about in the open. Strangers dared not ask too many questions and certainly not the directions to one of these "smokestacks." Most whiskey-makin' folks by custom shied away from strangers, fearing revenuers. It was said that if a revenuer ever found one of the stills, he would never make it back alive. A few of the older children sometimes made their spending money by keeping a "look-out" for revenuers. Some were paid as much as ten cents a day for sitting atop a house or barn looking for any alien vehicle or stranger riding horseback down the dusty road.

But three of the McClain sisters wouldn't protect their husband's family business. Maud, the oldest, married Rube Vincent and lived up on the hill east of the family homestead, where she and her sisters had grown up. Lillie, the third daughter, married Leslie Westmoreland, whose father

owned a sawmill in the area. Leslie learned his trade as a teamster and logger from his father. Ola McClain, youngest of the three sisters and the twin of Ollie, married Wesley Maupin on Sprout's Levy. At age seventeen, Wes turned teamster and logger, too. Often he and Leslie worked together for their father-in-law, snaking logs out of the swamp with an ox team. Wesley and Leslie each lived with his family in a two-room house near the edge of the swamp running parallel to Powell Creek.

Early one June morning Maud came to visit these two younger sisters. The three always had a good time together, laughing at stories each told about different characters in the family. Lillie and Ola were standing on either side of the iron wash pot out in the yard that morning. Each was doing family laundry. They had boiled the first batch of clothes and were hanging their wash on the line. When Maud walked up, the sisters gave her a hug, and then all three started talking at the same time. Somehow in their conversation, the unpleasant subject of whisky came up. All three women were violently opposed to any kind of liquor and especially overindulgence by some members of their large extended family.

"We oughta break up ever' still in this county!" Lillie bent over to chunk another stick under the wash pot.

Ola didn't want this sensitive subject dropped: "Well," she said, "if ya'll will holp me, we'll get the ax and put a end to all this foolishness."

"How could just the three of us do such a thing, Oler?" Maud asked.

"I'll show you. Come on, Lil. We'll get the axes from the shed."

When Ola and Lillie got to the lean-to, Lillie grabbed the ax nearest the door and Ola called to Maud:

"There's only two axes here, Maud. What tool you gonna take?"

"I reckon that there hoe leanin' ag'in' the tree," Maud decided.

Lillie banked the fire under the wash pot, and the three sisters tramped off towards the woods and an opening between oak trees. They soon stepped along heavy planks of timber laid down for a walkway through the swamp. The woods were dark, the odors musty. No one said a word until they reached the high ground where the still was hid.

Finding the site, the women were astonished at the length of the worm's copper tubing and all of the other whiskey makin's. Mash barrels were covered by a cap that had formed over the corn, sugar and yeast while it was fermenting. But the copper kettle sat cold. It had been a while since a fire had been lit under it. Copper tubing wormed its way from the cooker to the condenser sitting in the creek. Many moonshiners called this a "thump keg" because it had to be smacked regularly to make the very hot steam flowing through copper condense into "firewater." A short copper pipe curved from the condenser into a huge crockery jug stationed to catch the whiskey dripping from the pipe. When this container was full, the alcohol was poured into a five or ten-gallon charcoal-lined keg, sealed and then set aside, ready for sale.

Many such kegs were stacked along the tree line. Others sat empty, their insides burned to a dark char. These were ready to receive another cook-off of pure "White Lightnin'." Sometimes late at night, wagons or big trucks would pull up to one of the family farmhouses. The farmer would light his lantern and lead the drivers to the edge of the woods. Just about sun-up, the wagon or truckbed with a heavy tarp tied over it headed for other parts of the county or state.

"Lordy me, Oler!" Maud cried. "Do you think anybody'll catch us? This may take a mite longer than we can stay away from the house."

"We're gonna do what we can today, Maud. You can take that hoe if you want to and pull the sawdust away from the kegs, and me and Lillie 'll

lay our axes to them barrels. Let's get started, an' if'n you have to say somethin,' *whisper*. You never know who's in these woods."

The sisters began to lay waste to the family still and its whiskey makin's. Two hours later they raised their hands triumphantly and pronounced the job well done. Copper tubing lay scattered in foot-length pieces. The big copper cooker sat cockeyed looking over charcoal kegs with dents knocked all the way around the size of cooking pots. Fresh spring water flowed over the smashed condenser. Hundred-gallon barrels of mash lay with bungholes smashed. Broken staves stuck out of the sawdust like fence posts, their hoops twisted like licorice twist. Spilled alcohol trickled through sawdust, finding its way down the hill finally and into the swamp. Kegs scattered here and there lay crushed and emptied of clear whiskey. It would be a long time before the moon would shine on this whiskey still.

On their way back through the woods, smelling like the sour mash they had destroyed, the sisters Maud, Lillie and Ola agreed they would never tell a living soul who could have wreaked such havoc. The three knew the unspoken law. At least now, their husbands wouldn't maim or kill revenuers trying to break up the family cash crop. The truth about who broke up this busthead business wasn't supposed to be revealed until the last still-buster died.

Somebody must have talked.